

Seeing and Believing: Women, Religion and Film

Fall, 2010 Rel 136 AB

Monday, 6 – 8:30; Tuesday, 1:10 – 2:20 OR Thursday, 1:10 – 2:20

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call or email if you'd like to make an appt to speak with me – I invite all students to seek me out in my office at least once during the semester!

Regular office hours: T/TR 11:30 – 1:00 pm

Course Description: “A film invites interrogation” (Makarushka:1998). In this course we will 1) explore how films appropriate religious imagery and beliefs in the service of the cultural production of images of women and women's lives; and 2) investigate the ways in which the creation and viewing of film may share similarities with the construction and practice of religion. Along the way we will delve into the following themes: the representation of Jewish and Islamic women and men in a dominantly Christian society; Christian Fundamentalism, Jewish Orthodoxy, millennialism and women's lives; religious authority, gender, sexuality and love; and more. We will approach our films as “texts” that invite a critical reading, and develop skills to enable our increased thoughtful, deliberate, intelligent viewing. Class time will be equally divided between the viewing of our films and time for lecture and lively discussion/debate. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with Blackboard, as we will be using this online resource in our course.

Course Objectives:

- 1) We will develop self- awareness regarding the ways we approach/absorb films, especially commercial films, and build skills to distinguish extra and intra-filmic strategies that encourage various interpretive schemes on the part of audiences. We will learn a variety of critical methods to “interrogate” as well as appreciate film.
- 2) We will improve our critical thinking, speaking, research and writing skills.
- 3) We will develop an introductory understanding of some of the complex relationships between portrayals and questions of religion, and constructions of gender, race and class.

Course Books:

The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film, Ed. John Lyden (London: Routledge, 2009). Please purchase this in the Moravian College Bookstore

The following books will be on reserve in Reeve's Library and you will be required to access and use them at various junctures throughout our semester:

John C. Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003)

Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Beacon Press, 1996)

bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Adele Reinhartz, *Scripture on the Silver Screen*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003);

Additional articles, book chapters and essays will be assigned and likely posted in Blackboard or available at Reeve's on reserve.

Course Films: Each week we will focus on a different film that we will view during class time (listed below according to schedule). You are responsible for having intelligently and carefully viewed all the films in the course, including any that you miss because of an excused absence. Speak with me about how best to gain access to any film you may miss.

Requirements:

- 1) Our work together depends upon everyone's prompt and engaged participation in every class. The only excused absences will be for serious illness, religious observance or a family emergency (unexcused absence will mean a serious detraction in this part of your grade). I ask you to inform me AHEAD of class time if you need to miss as a result of one of these reasons stated above (please call me at my office, at x7104). In order to participate fully and with intelligence in our class discussions, students also will have thoughtfully and deliberately read all the required readings before your section on Tuesday or Thursday; and will be prepared for the class quiz. ***Bring whatever text we are reading for the day with you to your section!*** All students are expected to contribute to our class discussions with intelligence, responding to one another thoughtfully, raising good questions and new ideas, etc. Push yourself (even if this makes you uncomfortable) to grow as a liberal arts learner who can speak articulately in public, and come meet with me individually if you need help in this area. Each of the T/R sections will begin with a short quiz based on the readings you have been asked to prepare for that day. The quizzes, plus class participation in these areas represents 1/3 of the overall grade.

Important note on required time you should allot for this course. The minimum expectation of the college is that students should expect to spend a minimum 2 outside hours in study and preparation for every 1 hour in class. You should plan now on including in your schedule at least six outside hours every week for reading, thinking (don't forget to allow yourself time to think!), quiz preparation, research and writing. Take time to discuss our films and readings with others! These hours will increase in the weeks you have papers due.

- 2) Students will write three 4-5 page, double-spaced papers over the course of the semester. Each of these papers will focus on the content of a particular week's assignment (film plus required readings), and in some way take further the analysis we have begun in our class discussion. Be creative and use these papers to further your own integrative thinking about our readings and film! No additional outside resources are required for these short papers (but if you wish to consult additional reviews/resources, you may. In that case, correct citation and works cited page will be necessary). In these short papers you will use your own

best critical thinking to address: 1) the required readings in connection with a given film, 2) the class discussion following our viewing, and 3) your own developing response and awareness. Do NOT use these papers to “retell the narrative.” Students who take the opportunity to come and see me early in the semester to talk about their short papers invariably improve their writing – make sure you do this! Make note of the due dates for your papers in the schedule of classes below. These papers combined will represent 1/3 of the overall grade. See the guidelines in Blackboard Assignments for further suggestions on writing superb short papers.

- 3) Each student will choose one course film for the purpose of more in-depth research and analysis. You will consult at least five additional resources beyond those in the required readings (at least three resources will be academic, analytical explorations), think through all the issues carefully, and write an 8-10 page paper, to be submitted in class on Dec. 6 in hard copy. The only acceptable excuses for requesting an extension on this paper are the same listed for excused absence above. Your paper will include proper footnotes and bibliography (check MLA style if you’re not sure how to go about this; Reeve’s library databases have helpful links); and will in some way focus on the intersection of gender, film and religion in the film you have chosen – other than that you are free to explore and dig in whatever direction you wish.
- On Oct. 18, come to class with one paragraph about the film from our course that you have decided to research (in the case of films we haven’t yet seen, you can find out a lot about them through Imdb.com). Detail the beginning questions, issues and themes you hope to focus on in this project. Be ready to talk about this with your peers in class.
 - On Nov. 1, hand in a 1 paragraph description of the thesis you are interrogating in your paper, and your annotated bibliography. Please consult the Cornell University website on how to put together an annotated bibliography (<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>), and please note that this means **you will need to have completed your research in advance of this date**. The research librarians have generously arranged for a research workshop based on this course requirement at our library, set for Oct. 18 at the beginning of class. On the last day of class we will celebrate with a “research roundtable” at which every student will have a few minutes to professionally present the results of his/her research to the rest of the class (and perhaps we’ll also have a potluck dinner or dessert together). Your paper and oral presentation represent 1/3 of your total grade.

Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy in the Student Handbook (available online) and required to follow the guidelines therein.

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

Schedule of Classes

First Unit: History of Interaction between Religion and Film

Aug. 30 *The Jazz Singer*, Warner Bros. Pictures and the Vitaphone Corporation; directed by Alan Crosland. Originally released as motion picture in 1927.

Introduction to course

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Introduction, Chapters One and Two

Also read: bell hooks, “the oppositional gaze: black female spectators,” *Reel to Real: Race, sex and class at the movies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 197-213 (on reserve in Reeve’s)

Sept. 6 *Dead Man Walking*, Gabriel Axel, 1987

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Chapter Three, “The Roman Catholic Church and cinema (1976 to the present); Chapter 21, “Heroes and Superheroes” and Chapter 23, “Jesus and Christ-Figures”

Also read:

Adele Reinhartz, “*Dead Man Walking* and the Riddle of Divine Justice (Leviticus),” *Scripture on the Silver Screen*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); (on reserve in Reeve’s)

Sept. 13 *Left Behind*, Vic Sarin, 2000

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Chapter Four, “Modern Protestant Approaches to Film (1960 to present)”

Also Read: Jason Byasee, “*En-raptured*,” *Christian Century*, April 20, 2004, Vol. 121, Issue 8 (available online through Academic Search Elite – enter “en-raptured” into field)

DUE at beginning of class, hard copy, 4-5 page double-spaced paper focusing on one of the films we have viewed thus far, analyzing the film further with the help of the course readings, class discussion and your own best critical thinking!

Second Unit: Depictions of and by Religious Practitioners in Films

Sept. 20: *Hester Street*, Midwest Film Production, Inc., Stamford, CT: Vestron Video, c1984, Screenplay-director, Joan Micklin Silver ; producer, Raphael D. Silver.

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Chapter 5: “Judaism”

Also read: Hester Street: film and fiction By: Kessner, Carole S.. Source:

Reconstructionist, 41 no 10 Ja 1976, p 18-22. (available through ATLA)

Selection from Michael Gold, *Jews without Money* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1930) (this will be available in Blackboard documents)

Thursday September 23rd: Fall Convocation – It is expected that all students will attend the fall convocation.

Sept. 27: *The Siege*, Edward Zwick, 2004

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Chapter 7: “Islam”

Also read: Margaret Miles, “Chapter Four: Representation of Islam in American Culture,” *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Beacon Press, 1996) (on reserve in Reeve’s)

Assignment: Find two news reports from this fall that illustrate the continuing dynamic of “Islamophobia” in U.S. culture and politics – read them carefully, bring them to class and be prepared to talk about them.

Oct. 4 *Water*, Deepa Mehta Films, Twentieth Century Fox, 2006.

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Chapter 8 “Hinduism”

Also read: **Deepa Mehta's Film Water: The Power or the Dialectical Image** By: Mukherjee, Tutun; Canadian Journal of Film Studies/Revue Canadienne d'Etudes Cinematographiques, 2008 Fall; 17 (2): 35-47. (available in Blackboard documents) **Widowed in India**. By: Petrakis, John. *Christian Century*, 6/13/2006, Vol. 123 Issue 12, p41-41, 1p. (available through Ebscohost, Academic Elite)

No class Oct. 9-13: Fall recess

Oct. 18 No film tonight! We will meet at Reeve’s Library for a research workshop; then convene on the bottom floor of the library for discussion. During this week, see *A History of Violence* on your own (the film is available on reserve in Reeve’s, and also available through popular venues such as Netflix and Blockbuster); also use the time to begin composing your research annotated bibliography.

Due at beginning of class: hard-copy, 4-5 page short paper on one of the films from Unit Two

Also due: 1 brief paragraph about the film you hope to research and your beginning questions/themes for exploration.

Important Note: We will begin Class in the computer alcove in Reeves Library with a one hour research workshop led by our research librarians to build your skills for our class research projects. After the workshop we will move downstairs for discussion of the workshop and the initial sharing/discussion of our research projects. Please be ready to share which of the films you intend to analyze further for your research paper. Come with a short paragraph (you will hand in a hard copy of this paragraph to the prof) that details the particular questions, issues and themes you intend to explore.

Third Unit: Academic Approaches to the study of Religion and Film

Oct. 25 *A History of Violence*, David Cronenberg, New Line Productions, 2005.

Important Note: This is the only film that you are asked to view on your own – please do so IN ADVANCE of our class tonight! The film is available on reserve (it is also available through Blockbuster). We will use the entire class time for extended discussion and analysis of this film.

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Chapter 17: “Theological Approaches”

Marc Luedke, “Images of Humanity in the Old Testament and the Contemporary Cinema,” *Anvil*, 16 no 1 1999, p 31-40. (In Blackboard documents)

bell hooks, "whose pussy is this? A feminist comment" *Reel to Real: Race, sex and class at the movies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 227-235 (on reserve in Reeve's)

Nov. 1 *Mar Adentro/The Sea Inside*, Alejandro Amenabar, Filmanova, 2005.

Read: *The Routledge Companion*, Chapter 26, "Ethics"

Also Read: Adam, Eve, and the AMA: some theological reasons to support physician-assisted suicide By: Baroody, Joe. Source: Chaplaincy Today, 22 no 2 Aut-Wint 2006, p 23-32 (available through ATLA)

Physicians, chaplains, and physician-assisted suicide: responses to "Adam, Eve, and the AMA" By: Teague, Paula Jeanne; McCurdy, David B.. Source: Chaplaincy Today, 22 no 2 Aut-Wint 2006, p 33-40 (available through ATLA)

Due at beginning of class: your annotated bibliography for your research paper, in hard copy, plus one paragraph about the film you have chosen and the theme/argument/question you are researching with respect to your film

Nov. 8 *Courage Under Fire*, Edward Zwick, Twentieth Century Fox, 1996.

Read: Selection from Robert Eberwein, ed., *The War Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006). (available on Blackboard documents)

Nov. 15 Film TBA (Class will have the opportunity in consensus to choose a film in connection with our course!)

Readings: TBA

Important note: please make an appt. to see me for a 15 minute consultation about your research and writing between now and Dec. 1

Nov. 22 *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*

Read: Making Movies to Change the World. By: Moring, Mark. Christianity Today, Feb2009, Vol. 53 Issue 2, p40-42, 3p; (available through Ebscohost)

For the Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism. By: Dick, Jeff T.. Library Journal, 3/1/2010, Vol. 135 Issue 4, p51-51, 1/8p (available through Ebscohost)

The Routledge Companion, Chapter 14, "Audience Reception," and Chapter 15, "Cultural Theory and Cultural Studies"

Nov. 29 Reality TV: your favorite guilty pleasure???

Episode from "Jersey Girls"?

Due on Monday, Nov. 29, at the beginning of class: 4-5 page hard copy short paper on one of the films from Unit Three.

In class: workshop on final draft of your research paper and presentation of research findings.

Dec. 6 Last day of class: handing in of research papers and research roundtable – location: TBA. Plan on bringing something to share for our dinner together, as we celebrate our good work at the semester's end!